

# **FINDING MY ABSENT FATHER**

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## CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Date: 13.2.18

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to the next generations: my children Tom and Georgie and my grandson, Kyden. May you know peace.

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## FORMAT OF THE THESIS

This thesis is comprised of two parts: an exegesis which examines three areas - the genre and form of life writing, the context of Cold War Australia and the memory work process of research in an unusual archive; and the larger creative non-fiction component, a hybrid memoir-biography-history, *Finding My Absent Father*.

Referencing used is The Harvard (UTS) Referencing Style based on the Australian Government's Style Guide for Authors, Editors and Publishers (6th edition, 2002).

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

1. A version of Chapter 1 Life Writing and Public Memory - why so popular? has been published as ‘Genre is a minimum security prison’: Writing a life’ in P. Ashton, A. Clark, & R. Crawford, *Once Upon a Time: Australian Writers on Using the Past*, 2016, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne.
2. A version of Chapter 2 Cold War Exile and a Search for Justice will be published in April, 2018 as ‘A Father’s Cold War Exile and a Daughter’s Search for Reconciliation’ in J. Keene & E. Rechiniewski (eds.) *Seeking Meaning, Seeking Justice In A Post Cold War World*, Brill Publishing, Leiden, Netherlands.
3. A version of Chapter 3 I Can’t Call Australia Home: Memory Work in the Archives has been published with the same title in the journal *Life Writing*, October, 2017.
4. Forthcoming chapter ‘The Reluctant Migrant: A Polish Father’ in K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton (eds) *Remembering Migration: Oral Histories and Heritage in Australia*, Palgrave MacMillan.
5. A longer version of the creative component is currently under consideration by a publisher after being judged runner-up in the New South Wales Writers Centre Varuna prize in October, 2017.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores aspects of post-war Polish migration that have largely been ignored to date through a hybrid memoir-biography-history and exegesis to tell the story of the reconstruction of the life of my absent father, Antoni Jagielski - a Roman Catholic, Polish resistance fighter and World War II concentration camp survivor. From documents, letters and photographs found in an unexpectedly inherited family flat on a research trip to Poland and additional information about my father's life gathered from archives in Auschwitz, Gusen, Mauthausen, the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust and the Polish Institute in London, I developed a chronology of his secret life and concluded that he was a reluctant migrant to Australia in 1955. My father's story provides a counter balance to the existing weight of migration memory in mainstream Australian culture and highlights facets of Polish immigration and the often-forgotten stories of migrants who were to leave Australia and return 'home'. This memory work of constructing and documenting the life of my father, brings together intergenerational memory and transnational historical discourse within a broader narrative of war, exile and migration. It is the story of one family amongst millions whose lives were fractured by World War II.